Introduction to the special issue

Introduction to the special issue

Elizabeth J. Austin

Department of Psychology, University of Edinburgh, UK

Donald H. Saklofske

Division of Applied Psychology, University of Calgary, Canada

To construct this special issue the editors invited some leading researchers in the field of emotional intelligence (EI) to contribute a paper presenting recent research findings. No editorial steer was given on what the content of these papers should be, apart from specifying that the study reported should be on EI, and the authors did not consult with each other about topic choices. Nonetheless, the resulting six papers turned out to display a high degree of thematic coherence, and can be regarded as providing a good reflection of current research priorities in this field. Interestingly, one area of consensus was a focus on trait rather than ability EI, with all the studies reported using trait EI measures. Trait EI is measured by self-report and is a component of personality, emerging as a separate factor within established personality models (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). By contrast, ability EI is measured by tests which resemble standard intelligence tests, and has been proposed as a new intelligence component. Some further discussion of ability EI, and why trait measures are currently more widely used than ability measures, appears at the end of this introduction. The themes which emerged from the papers in the special issue, and the cross-linkages between them, will now be considered.

One major theme of these papers is how EI relates to well-being and positive life outcomes. Here theoretical considerations lead to the expectation that EI will be positively correlated with positive indicators such as life satisfaction and negatively with indicators of psychological distress. This is because intrapersonal EI (related to understanding emotions in oneself and emotion regulation) should promote stress management and adaptive coping, whilst interpersonal EI should also contribute to

positive psychological processes because high-EI individuals are able to form better social support networks. This expectation has been confirmed in many studies in which EI has shown the expected correlation pattern - positive with life satisfaction and negative with anxiety, depression and loneliness and other measures of low psychological well-being (e.g. Bastian, Burns, & Nettelbeck., 2005; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003; Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2007). Positive associations of EI with adaptive coping have also been found (Bastian et al., 2005; Saklofske, Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, 2007). Previous work has also shown positive associations of EI with academic success and retention at university (Parker, Hogan, Eastabrook, Oke, & Wood, 2006; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004), and negative associations with problematic behaviours in schoolchildren (Petrides, Fredrickson, & Furnham, 2004). Findings of this type are consistent with the view that the EI-related benefits of psychological adjustment feed forward into life outcomes.

In the current set of papers, Schutte et al. (2010) examine how EI relates to subjective well-being (SWB), finding that EI acts as a mediator of the influence of processing style on SWB, whilst Garder and Qualter (2010) examine the associations of EI with a range of measures of psychological functioning, covering aggression, loneliness, eating disorders, alcoholism, and life satisfaction. The results of Downey, Johnston, Hansen, Birney & Stough (2010) on adolescents show EI as protective against the occurrence of problem behaviours, whilst the studies of Austin et al. (2010) and Hogan et al. (2010) on student stress and academic performance respectively show that EI is associated with better academic performance, lower stress levels and higher levels of satisfaction with courses. In the Austin et al. study EI

subcomponents (in composite factors also containing coping style) were found to mediate the association between personality and stress in university students, whilst Hogan et al. found EI subcomponents mediated the association between IQ and GPA., although only for males in their adolescent sample. Both the Austin et al. (2010) and Downey et al. (2010) papers examine associations between EI and coping. Consistent with previous findings (Bastian et al., 2005; Saklofske et al., 2007), EI was found in this work to be associated positively with coping styles which are generally regarded as adaptive (e.g. task-focussed coping) and negatively with those which are generally maladaptive (e.g. emotion-focussed coping). The Austin et al. paper also explores the issue of communalities between EI and coping, with a factor- analytic approach leading to the examination of three higher-order composites of EI and coping scales.

Another theme which arises from the papers is that of comparing EI tests, and of the importance of considering subscales as well as full-scale scores. There are a number of EI instruments available based on different theoretical conceptualisations of the construct, and there is no consensus in the current literature as to the "best" choice of EI scale in particular contexts. Gardner & Qualter (2010) undertake an extensive validity comparison of three EI scales: the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998), the Multidimensional Emotional Intelligence Assessment (Tett, Fox, & Wang, 2005), and the TEIQue (Petrides, 2009). This includes examination of the use of total EI score vs. EI subcomponents as predictors, with the finding that larger validity coefficients were obtained when using lower-level subcomponents. The incremental validity of each measure over age, gender and personality, and the ability of each scale to increment the other two were also examined. The results showed that, whilst all the scales showed concurrent validity,

the TEIQue generally had the greatest predictive power, the most likely explanation for this being its broader coverage of the EI domain. These results suggest that more comparative research on EI models and scales needs to be undertaken. As pointed out by Gardner and Qualter (2010), the issue of the "best" EI scale for a particular application is a complex one, involving considerations such as scale length, parsimony (many vs. fewer subscales) and cost, as well as strength of association with the relevant criteria. The additional understanding that can be obtained by focussing on EI subcomponents rather than total scores is also highlighted in some of the other papers. Austin et al. (2010) identify the EQ-i (Bar-On, 2002) subscales of Intrapersonal, Stress Management and General Mood as loading with emotion-focussed coping on a higher-order Emotion Regulation factor, with this factor being a key predictor of level of stress and SWB. Similarly, Downey et al., identify the Emotional Recognition and Expression, Understanding Emotions, and Emotional Management and Control dimensions of the adolescent SUEIT (Luebbers, Downey, & Stough, 2007) as particularly salient to problem behaviours, and Hogan et al. (2010) find that the Adaptability and Stress Management subscales of the Youth Version of the EQ-i (Bar-On & Parker, 2000) are predictive of GPA in adolescents.

Group differences in EI are considered by Sánchez-Ruiz, Pérez-González and Petrides (2010) who examined the EI profiles of students in different faculties, finding significant group differences for overall EI and also for some subscales. The findings included an interesting gender x faculty interaction, with female social science students scoring higher than males on emotionality, but female humanities students scoring lower. Sánchez-Ruiz et al. suggest that the examination of EI profiles of different student groups can inform career counselling, and may also be relevant to academic adjustment and to course design for particular groups of students (for

example differences in empathy and emotional expressiveness between Social Science and Technical Studies students may mean that collaborative group tasks work better with the former). These findings and those discussed above suggest that for university students a two-pronged approach to integrating research findings on EI into student support might be appropriate. Group differences as found by Sánchez-Ruiz et al. can be used to suggest approaches which are on average most suitable for students with particular academic interests. At the individual level, Austin et al. (2010) suggest that EI profiles can be used to identify students who are likely to be vulnerable to academic stress, allowing interventions to be targeted more effectively The results from this study suggest that interventions on EI and coping subcomponents related to emotion regulation are likely to be most effective, whilst the results of Hogan et al., and Downey et al. similarly provide suggestions for EI subcomponents for which interventions appear most promising to promote academic success and reduce problem behaviours in adolescents. The findings of Schutte et al. (2010) on EI and processing style preferences suggests another possible research direction in the study of EI profiles and intervention targeting.

The above summary of the content of the special issue as a snapshot of current research on EI indicate a lively and expanding area. The focus of these papers was trait EI, with no studies using ability EI tests being reported; this omission is an interesting one which is worthy of a brief discussion. It reflects in part the greater difficulty of running large-sample studies including ability EI measures. The selection of EI tests for these studies may however also have been influenced by the current problematic status of the theory and measurement of ability EI. As discussed above, trait EI is well-established as part of the personality domain. This means that researchers understand what the use of trait EI measures will contribute to their

research. Ability EI is theoretically characterised as a new form of intelligence, covering the cognitive processing of emotional information (e.g. Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). Currently there are issues with the validation of ability EI, since the evidence for its convergent validity with respect to intelligence exists but is by no means overwhelming. The most robust results are for ability tests of emotional understanding, which have been found in a number of studies to be correlated with intelligence, particularly with crystallised ability (e.g. Farrelly & Austin, 2007; MacCann, Roberts, Matthews, & Zeidner, 2004; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001). The actual measurement of ability EI has raised concerns, in particular the scoring of tests by consensus methods (due to difficulties in constructing emotion problem-solving items with unique right answers) raises questions about the possibility of constructing EI tests which can truly assess a form of intelligence (e.g. Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2007). Taken together, these issues mean that researchers generally feel less confident with the current generation of ability EI measures than with trait measures. Future developments in the theory and measurement of ability EI could change perceptions, but the situation reflected in the current collection is one where researchers feel more willing to focus on the study of EI as a dispositional trait rather than of EI as a putative new intelligence.

References

Austin, E. J., Saklofske, D. H., & Wills, S. (2010). Emotional intelligence, coping, and exam-related stress in Canadian undergraduate students. *Australian Journal of Psychology*.

Bar-On, R. (2002). *Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Short. Technical manual.* Toronto: Multi-Health Systems.

Bar-On, R., & Parker, J.D.A. (2000). *The Bar-On EQ-i: YV: The technical manual.* Toronto, Canada: Multi-Health Systems.

Bastian, V. A., Burns, N. R., & Nettelbeck, T. (2005). Emotional intelligence predicts life skills, but not as well as personality and cognitive abilities. *Personality and Individual Differences, 39,* 1135-1145.

Ciarrochi, J. V., Chan, A. Y., & Caputi, P. (2000). A critical evaluation of the emotional intelligence construct. *Personality and Individual Differences, 28,* 539-561.

Downey, L. A., Johnstone, P. J., Hansen, K., Birney, J., & Stough, C. (2010). Investigating the mediating effects of emotional intelligence on problem behaviours in adolescents. *Australian Journal of Psychology*.

Farrelly, D., & Austin, E. J. (2007). Ability EI as an intelligence? Associations of the MSCEIT with performance on emotion processing and social tasks and with cognitive ability. *Cognition and Emotion, 21,* 1043-1063.

Gardner, K. J., & Qualter, P. (2010). Concurrent and incremental validity of three trait emotional intelligence measures. *Australian Journal of Psychology*.

Hogan, M. J., Parker, J. D. A., Wiener, J., Watters, C., Wood, L. M., & Oke, A. (2010). Relationships among verbal IQ, social support and emotional intelligence. *Australian Journal of Psychology.*

Luebbers, S., Downey, L.A., & Stough, C., (2007). The development of an adolescent measure of EI. Personality and Individual Differences 42, 999-1009.

MacCann, C., Roberts, R. D., Matthews, G., & Zeidner, M. (2004). Consensus scoring and empirical option weighting of performance-based emotional intelligence (EI) tests. *Personality and Individual Differences, 36,* 645-662.

Matthews, G., Zeidner, M., & Roberts, R. D. (2007). Emotional intelligence. Consensus, controversies, and questions. In G. Matthews, M. Zeidner, & R. D. Roberts (Eds.), *The science of emotional intelligence. Knowns and unknowns* (pp. 3-46). New York: Oxford University Press.

Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D.R., & Salovey, P. (1999). Emotional intelligence meets traditional standards for an intelligence. *Intelligence, 27,* 267-298.

Mayer, J. D., Roberts, R. D., & Barsade, S. G. (2008). Human abilities: Emotional intelligence. *Annual Review of Psychology, 59,* 507-536.

Parker, J. D. A., Hogan, M. J., Eastabrook, J. M., Oke, A., & Wood, L. M. (2006). Emotional intelligence and student retention: Predicting the successful transition from high school to university. *Personality and Individual Differences, 41,* 1329-1336.

Parker, J. D. A., Summerfeldt, L. J., Hogan, M. J., & Majeski, S. A. (2004). Emotional intelligence and academic success: Examining the transition from high school to university. *Personality and Individual Differences, 36,* 163-172.

Petrides, K. V. (2009). *Technical manual for the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaires (TEIQue).* London: London Psychometric Laboratory

Petrides, K.V., Frederickson, N., & Furnham R. (2004). The role of trait emotional intelligence in academic performance and deviant behaviour at school. Personality and Individual Differences, 36, 277-293.

Petrides, K. V., Pita, R., & Kokkinaki, F. (2007). The location of trait emotional intelligence in personality factor space. *British Journal of Psychology, 98*, 273-289.

Roberts, R. D., Zeidner, M., & Matthews, G. (2001). Does emotional intelligence meet traditional standards for an intelligence? Some new data and conclusions. *Emotion, 1,* 196-231.

Roberts, R. D., Zeidner, M., & Matthews, G. (2007). Emotional intelligence. Knowns and unknowns. In G. Matthews, M. Zeidner, & R. D. Roberts (Eds.), *The science of emotional intelligence. Knowns and unknowns* (pp. 419-474). New York: Oxford University Press.

Saklofske, D. H., Austin, E. J., Galloway, J., & Davidson, K. (2007). Individual difference correlates of health-related behaviours: preliminary evidence for links between emotional intelligence and coping. *Personality and Individual Differences, 42,* 491-502.

Saklofske, D. H., Austin, E. J., & Minski, P. S. (2003). Factor structure and validity of a trait emotional intelligence measure. *Personality and Individual Differences, 34,* 707-721.

Sánchez-Ruiz, M. J., Pérez-González, J. C., & Petrides, K. V. (2010). Trait emotional intelligence profiles of students from different university faculties. *Australian Journal of Psychology.*

Schutte, N.S., Malouff, J.M., Hall, L.E., Haggerty, D.J., Cooper, J.T., Golden, C.J., & Dornheim, L. (1998). Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences, 25,* 167-177.

Schutte, N.S., Malouff, J.M., Thorsteinsson, E.B., Bhullar, N., & Rooke, S.E., (2007). A meta-analytic investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and health. *Personality and Individual Differences, 42,* 921-933.

Schutte, N. S., Thorsteinsson, E. B., Hine, D. W., Foster, R., Cauchi, A., & Binns, C. (2010). Experiential and rational processing styles, emotional intelligence and well-being. *Australian Journal of Psychology.*

Tett, R. P., Fox, K. E., & Wang, A. (2005). Development and validation of a self-report measure of emotional intelligence as a multidimensional trait domain. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31,* 1-30.